

STAFFORD: You do . . . good work, Dr. Hooper.

HOOPER: *(Stops. Long, slow smile.)* All right, professor. Your foot's in the door.

STAFFORD: Good. When I can have the text?

HOOPER: Ease up, I hadn't said you won. I said you had a chance. First, I want to know why you've really changed your mind, and just what you want with my baby. Second, I want more abject flattery. We'll have dinner, talk it all out. I'll pick you up at your office at half past six tomorrow.

STAFFORD: Doctor, really, you will not—

HOOPER: Friday then. It's a date.

EXPECTING ISABEL

BY LISA LOOMER

CHARACTERS

NICK (40), *Italian-American artist and believer*; MIRANDA (30s), *a wonderer, not a cynic, a woman who questions everything*

SCENE

The playground

TIME

The present

NICK and MIRANDA are fifty thousand dollars in debt from their various desperate efforts to conceive a child. NICK's unwillingness to proceed further has resulted in an estrangement in their marriage and both have returned to their mothers. NICK haunts the neighborhood playground, hoping MIRANDA will appear.

NICK: I knew she'd show up at the playground eventually. Lila lives just a couple of blocks away. *(Looks at watch.)* And martini time is five. *(MIRANDA enters the playground and sees him.)*

MIRANDA: *(Tentative; bit cool.)* Hi.

NICK: *(Turns; "surprised.")* Oh hey—hi. *(Pause.)* How you doin'?

MIRANDA: *(Defensive.)* I'm fine. Well, my hair's falling out, but they say that's just the hormones leaving my system.

NICK: Looks good. Gives you . . . more face.

MIRANDA: *(Smiles despite herself.)* Yeah? How are you?

NICK: Me? Great—

MIRANDA: *(Bit hurt.)* Yeah?

NICK: Well, not great. . . . I'm good. . . . I'm . . . lousy.

MIRANDA: So, uh, what are you doing down here?

NICK: I had a job interview nearby.

MIRANDA: *(Surprised.)* Really? How'd it go?

NICK: Well... I got it.

MIRANDA: (*Excited for him.*) You did? Nick, that's wonderful!

NICK: Hey, sit down a minute—

MIRANDA: No, that's okay— (*SHE keeps her distance. HE forges on.*)

NICK: I'm painting a mural for a kid's room. Folks live in the Dakota.

MIRANDA: What are you painting?

NICK: Well, the parents are in international law. They want *Guernica*. *Guernica* with Disney characters. But they want it in browns and beiges to work with the apartment. (*To audience.*) I knew that would get her—

MIRANDA: Oh Nick. Well, at least you got a job!

NICK: And their neighbor wants me to paint her kid's room, too. She wants bunnies on the walls. Bunnies with open arms. Seems her and her husband adopted a child from this orphanage in Romania where the kids spend their first couple of years strapped to a bed. (*Beat.*) And I got to thinking...

MIRANDA: Yeah?

NICK: All those kids out there... (*Pause.*) And we're knocking ourselves out to bring another one into the world.

MIRANDA: Who's knocking themselves out? I went to a sperm bank—

NICK: And you know, I gotta admit I'm just a little surprised you'd do something like that with a stranger. (*To audience.*) This is a woman that's squeamish about taking a lick from someone else's ice cream!

MIRANDA: Nick, I was just looking into—

NICK: What? Like window shopping? You know, I don't even know if I want to be with a woman who's been with another man's—

MIRANDA: I went to a sperm bank! I didn't make a withdrawal—!

NICK: You didn't? (*SHE shakes her head no.*) No. (*Relieved and moved.*) Well, good. That's... really good. 'Cause you know, I've been thinking... (*Pause; emotional.*) See, I always thought we'd have a kid with your brains... and my hands. And if it was a girl, she'd have yellow hair... but maybe know her way around the kitchen.

MIRANDA: (*Fighting tears.*) Nick, I—I can't think about that child. I can't talk about that child. I can't. (*In the present.*) Please. Give me a minute.

NICK: Okay. (*SHE turns away from the audience. Continuing, to audience.*) But last night I'm watching the game with my family and I'm thinkin'— (*Pause.*) What if the kid had my brother's brains and her mother's... (*HE mimes drinking.*) I mean, it's not like ordering Chinese— (*MIRANDA turns.*)

MIRANDA: (*Softly.*) We would have had a wonderful child. (*SHE sits on a park bench.*)

NICK: Yes, we would. (*To audience.*) Maybe. (*Sits; to her.*) See, you... and my mother—and Einstein—you want to believe there's some order out there. That if you eat the right lunch—or say the novena—or find the right formula—then things'll work out. Because God doesn't play dice with the universe, right? But what if He does? What if He's got a serious gambling problem? Then what difference does it make if the kid comes from our bodies, or a test tube... or... or if we just adopt? (*Pause.*)

MIRANDA: You want to... adopt?

NICK: (*Looks out at playground/audience.*) Look at those kids. Do you think you could love one of them?

MIRANDA: (*SHE looks out. Trying.*) I guess... I mean—love is love. Right? (*Beat, turns to him.*) You really think you can just love someone for the rest of your life that wasn't related to you at all?

NICK: (*The proof.*) Well, I love you—

MIRANDA: (*Throws her arms around him.*) Oh, Nick, I love you too. I miss you! And I hate living with my mother!

NICK: (*Kissing her.*) Oh, baby, I hate living with my mother too. (*To audience.*) So I moved into Lila's because she had a three-bedroom apartment. And now that we weren't trying to make a baby, we started to make love again.

[[*Lila enters—in her apartment. SHE sees them kissing and exits fast.*]]

And we started to talk about adoption.